



Readings for Writers

ninth edition

*Jo Ray McCuen
Anthony C. Winkler*

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Glendale College

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Harcourt Brace College Publishers

*Fort Worth Philadelphia San Diego New York Orlando Austin San Antonio
Toronto Montreal London Sydney Tokyo*

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Cover Image and Details: © 1998 by Celia Johnson/SIS

ISBN: 0-15-503844-3

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 97-71822

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Address for Orders: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, FL 32887-6777. 1-800-782-4479.

Web site address: <http://www.hbcollege.com>

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Printed in the United States of America

7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 039 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*In fond memory of
Matthew Milan, Jr.,
our first editor.*

Preface



When the first edition of *Readings for Writers* was published in 1974, our rationale behind it was simple: to assemble a book with a wide variety of readings grouped under the unique labeling sequence of *Advice*, *Discussion*, or *Examples*. Twenty-four years later, the ninth edition of *Readings for Writers* remains true to its original design. Its selections are still grouped under its unique labeling sequence that shows how each reading is meant to be used. No piece is included as mere window dressing. Every selection has a specific role to play in helping teach students how to write.

Containing one hundred-twenty selections from a rich variety of writers and sources, the ninth edition of *Readings for Writers* continues to be a diverse collection. Its selections consist of seventy-four essays (ten of them by students), fourteen poems, twelve excerpts (from books and other sources), five short stories, five paragraphs, three speeches, three long student papers, one letter, one editorial, one article, and one diary entry. In addition, the book contains the reproductions of ten paintings and photographs, one for each *Issue For Critical Thinking and Debate* topic.

This ninth edition, however, is no mere clone of its predecessors but has its own special features. First among them is the greater voice we have given to student writers. All ten student essays in this edition are new, especially commissioned for this book, and reproduced in two drafts. The first is a rough draft with the student's own handwritten changes, the second a final draft ready to be submitted. The student writer then weighs in with a personal opinion on the writing process

under the headings of *How I Write*, *How I Wrote This Essay*, and *My Writing Tip*. The result is not only a faithful reflection of how all writers actually write—with the inevitably messy first drafts—but also provides some nuggets of practical advice fellow students should find both useful and engaging.

In a new edition of any reader the most obvious change is the selections. Twenty-six selections are new to this edition including the following: “A Diarist on Diarists” by Gail Godwin; “Books” by Allan Bloom; “Drug Use: The Continuing Epidemic” by Linda Kuncie; “A Good War Will Set Gen X Straight” by Brian Gabriel; and “Putting in a Good Word for Guilt” by Ellen Goodman. Back are the favorites “A, B, and C: The Human Elements in Mathematics” by Stephen Leacock; “Three Bears in Search of an Author,” by Dan Greenberg; and “The Odour of Cheese,” by Jerome K. Jerome. All three are hilarious and perennial favorites of long-time users.

We feature ten running *Issues for Critical Thinking and Debate*. We have replaced the issues of *Crime and Punishment*, *Immigrant Culture versus American Culture*, and *Poverty* with *Racism*, *The Values of a New Generation*, and *Homelessness*. As before, each issue consists of two pieces by professionals followed by a student opinion and is designed to stimulate class discussion that will, in turn, give students a hot topic to write about.

We continue many of the extras that users have grown to expect from *Readings for Writers*. Every selection is still followed by an accurate word count in parentheses, making *Readings for Writers* a practical and usable book for reading courses or for readers who wish to check their reading speed. We still end every chapter with three kinds of writing assignments: general assignments; Writing Assignments For A Specific Audience, which asks students to write for a specific, imagined audience; and Collaborative Writing Project, meant to involve several students in a joint writing assignment.

The main appeal of *Readings for Writers* has always been its diversity of selections that offer something for readers of every conceivable type and taste. To this end, we continue to roam the literary globe in search of writers and topics that are compelling. Contributors to this edition range from a former big-game hunter in India writing about why tigers become man eaters, to a New York lawyer tackling the incendiary topic of sex predators, to a diarist sharing with us what she has learned over the years about other diarists. In one selection readers sit in on a discussion of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with elders of a West African tribe; in another they witness a young Massachusetts mother’s slow and painful descent into homelessness. As ever, all the wide variety of selections have one common and overriding aim: to stimulate students to do their best writing.

We appreciate the dedication of the editorial, marketing, and production staff at Harcourt Brace. We thank John Meyers for his editorial direction. We are grateful for the contributions of our developmental editors, Terri House and Van Strength, who, with John, guided the book through the revision process. We appreciate the hard work of Isle Wolfe West for her continued efforts in marketing this text. Finally, we thank Candace Clifford, Kathleen Ferguson, and Nancy Marcus Land for their contributions throughout the production of the text.

We gratefully acknowledge the help and advice of many colleagues. Numbered among them, for this edition, are Darnell Eckersley, Southwest College; Shelly Jaffray, Rancho Santiago Community College; Ruby Lewis, Grambling State University; Lori Pangborne, Cyprus College; and Richard Tracz, Oakland Community College.

JO RAY McCUEN
ANTHONY C. WINKLER

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Guidelines for Critical Reading



Critical reading means reading with a conscious effort to see both sides of an issue, draw valid conclusions, and detect bias. It means burrowing below your immediate reaction and trying to fathom the underlying meaning of a piece of writing. This is not the sort of reading you do when you read a detective novel or a pulp magazine. But it is the best way to read, although perhaps the most strenuous, because it helps you to learn. Here are ten guidelines to help you read critically.

Understand What You Read

Reread difficult passages, looking up in a dictionary all the unfamiliar words. You cannot form an opinion of what you have read unless you understand what the author is saying.

Imagine an Opposing Point of View for All Opinions

If a writer says that the Arab punishment of cutting off the hands of a thief is more humane than the American equivalent of imprisonment, reverse the argument and see what happens. In other words, look for reasons that support the other side.

Search for Biases and Hidden Assumptions

Be alert to the biases of the writer. For example, an atheist arguing for abortion will not attribute a soul to the unborn fetus; a devout

Catholic will. To ferret out possible biases and hidden assumptions, check the author's age, sex, education, and ethnic background. These and other personal biographical facts might have influenced the opinions expressed in the work, but you cannot know to what extent unless you know something about the author. (That is the rationale behind the use of biographical headnotes, which accompany the articles in this book.)

Separate Emotion from Fact

Talented writers frequently color an issue with emotionally charged language, thus casting their opinions in the best possible light. For example, a condemned murderer may be described in sympathetic language that draws attention away from a horrifying crime. Be alert to sloganeering, to bumper-sticker philosophizing about complex issues. Emotion is no solution to complicated problems.

If the Issue Is New to You, Look Up the Facts

If you are reading about an unfamiliar issue, be willing to fill in the gaps in your knowledge with research. For example, if you are reading an editorial that proposes raising home insurance rates for families taking care of foster children, you will want to know why. Is it because foster children do more damage than natural children? Is it because natural parents are apt to file lawsuits against foster parents? You can find answers to these questions by asking representatives of the affected parties: the State Department of Social Services, typical insurance agencies, foster parents associations, the County Welfare Directors Association, any children's lobby, and others. To make a critical judgment you must know, and carefully weigh, the facts.

Use Insights from One Subject to Illuminate or Correct Another

Be prepared to apply what you already know to whatever you read. History can inform psychology; literature can give you insights into geography. For example, if a writer in psychology argues that most oppressed people develop a psychology of defeat that gives them a subconscious desire to be subjugated and makes them prey to tyrants, your knowledge of American history should tell you otherwise. As proof that oppressed people often fight oppression unto death, you can

point to the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, and the Black Hawk War of 1832—conflicts in which the Indians fought desperately to retain their territories rather than go meekly to the reservations. In other words, you can use what you have learned from history to refute a falsehood from psychology.

Evaluate the Evidence

Critical readers do not accept evidence at face value. They question its source, its verifiability, its appropriateness. Here are some practical tips for evaluating evidence:

- Verify a questionable opinion by cross-checking with other sources. For example, if a medical writer argues that heavy smoking tends to cause serious bladder diseases in males, check the medical journals for conformation of this view. Diligent research often turns up a consensus of opinion among the experts in any field.
- Check the date of the evidence. In science, especially, evidence varies from year to year. Before 1987, no one really knew exactly how the immune system worked. Then Susumu Tonegawa, a geneticist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discovered how the immune system protects the body from foreign substances by the manufacture of antibodies. In 1980, the evidence would say that the workings of the immune system were a mystery; that evidence would be inaccurate in 1987.
- Use common sense in evaluating evidence. For example, if a writer argues that a child's handwriting can accurately predict his or her life as an adult, your own experience with human nature should lead you to reject this conclusion as speculative. No convincing evidence exists to corroborate it.

Ponder the Values That Give an Argument Its Impetus

In writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson based his arguments on the value that "all men are created equal." On the other hand, Karl Marx based the arguments of his *Communist Manifesto* on the value that the laborer is society's greatest good. Critical reading means thinking about the values implicit in an argument. For instance, to argue that murderers should be hanged in public to satisfy society's need for revenge is to value revenge over human dignity. On the other hand, to argue that democracy can exist only with free speech is to highly value freedom of speech.

Look for Logical Fallacies

These typical logical flaws occur in a wide range of arguments: the *ad hominem* attack (attacking the person instead of the issue or argument); the *ad populum* appeal (the use of simplistic popular slogans to convince); the *false analogy* (comparing situations that have no bearing on each other); *begging the question* (arguing in circles); and *ignoring the question* (focusing on matters that are beside the point). For a better understanding of logical fallacies, review Chapter Nine, “Argumentation.”

Don't Be Seduced by Bogus Claims

Arguments are often based on unsubstantiated claims. For example, a writer may warn that “recent studies show women becoming increasingly hostile to men.” Or, another writer might announce, “Statistics have shown beyond doubt that most well-educated males oppose gun control.” You should always remain skeptical of these and similar claims when they are unaccompanied by hard-headed evidence. A proper claim will always be documented with verifiable evidence.